1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia

829 567 Asked if he remembered any other Africans who tied their heads up, the old man told us, "I membuh a ole uhmun name Daphne. He didn tie he head up lak ole man Israel. He weah loose wite veil on he head. He wuz shahp-feechuh too an light uh complexion. He weah one ring in he eah fuh he eyes.[27] I hab refrence to it bein some kine uh pruhtection (782) tuh he eyes. Wen he pray, he bow two aw tree times in duh middle uh duh prayuh."

535 We asked about the music they used to have and what they used for dancing in the old days.

"We ain dance den duh way dey dances now. We dance (533) roun in a succle an den we dances fuh prayin.[19a] I membuhs (534) we use tuh hab drums fuh music an we beat duh drum fuh dances.[23]

764 533 "Now, ole man Dembo he use tuh beat duh drum tuh duh fewnul,[24] but Mr. Couper he stop dat. He say he dohn wahn drums beatin roun duh dead. But I watch em hab a fewnul. I gits behine duh bush an hide an watch an see wut dey does. Dey go in a long pruhcession tuh duh buryin groun an dey beat duh drums long duh way an dey submit duh body tuh duh groun. Den dey dance roun in a ring an dey motion wid (535) duh hans.[18] Dey sing duh body tuh duh grabe an den dey let it down an den dey succle roun in duh dance.

567 782 "Dey ain hab no chuch in doze days an wen dey wannuh pray, dey git behine duh house aw hide someweah an make a great prayuh. Dey ain suppose tuh call on duh Lawd; dey hadduh call on duh massuh an ef dey ain do dat, dey git nine an tutty.

567 "Dey ain marry den duh way dey do now. Attuh slabery dey hadduh remarry. Dey hab big baptizin in duh ribbuh (585) lak dey do tuhday an dey dip em on duh ebb tuh wash duh (795) sins away an duh preachuh he make a great prayuh tuh duh (783) ribbuh.[63]

534 "Ole man Okra he a great un fuh buil drum.[25] He take a calf skin an tan it an make duh side uh maple. Ise pretty

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
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how strange it was that his first wife's two maids, who married in 1849, were still on "his place," in 1876. But what to Chaplin was even "stranger," was that these "girls" still "have the very same husbands." Undoubtedly many slaves kept the same mates if circumstances permitted. But Chaplin was aware of this fidelity only because the slaves were house servants. In a letter to Wendell Phillips Garrison, Laura Towne expressed "indignation" about articles appearing in the *Nation* concerning "immorality among the people of these islands." No one, said Towne, saw more of the islanders than she, "in every relation." Towne gave "an utter denial" of Gullah "immorality." Slavery "did what it could to confuse the minds of slaves with regard to conjugal relations." But added Towne, "a native fidelity—instinct perhaps," made the slave marriages "sacred in their own eyes and kept together without legal obligations." On the contrary, Towne stated that in her school of large boys and girls, there was "less impropriety—more purity— I may truly say— than is always met with among whites." When "immorality" occurred, it was "strictly dealt with by the church and by general reprobation in social life."[73]

Northern missionaries reported cases of slaves legalizing their unions out of respect for each other and also probably because of their love of ceremony and "title." Many couples having grown old together, went before "de parson." Elizabeth Botume witnessed the occasion of the civil ceremony between of Smart and Mary Washington who lived together for forty years. Smart and Mary shared a great deal through the years, and had nineteen children, only one of whom survived the antebellum years. According to Botume, the couple were very happy over the recognition their enduring relationship was given:

> They walked away together side by side, for the first time endowed with the honorable title of husband and wife. Smart chuckled well when we congratulated him, saying—
> "Him's my wife for sartin, now. Ef the ole hen run away, I shall cotch him sure."
> We thought there was no danger of good Aunt Mary's running away after so many years of faithful service.

During and directly after the Civil War, the situation wrought by slavery often led to much unhappiness. Husbands and wives who were separated and forced to take new partners returned to claim their old mates. Baptist discipline did not proscribe slave sales or interfere in any way with the "property" rights of slaveholders. "There was often great dis-

3: Creel H-4 (no date) 1988
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appointment," wrote Botume. "Sometimes two men claimed the same woman, whilst she coquetted not a little, evidently disposed to take the one that bid the highest." But, Botume added that this "rarely if ever" occurred when children were involved.[74]

Although the Committee on Discipline within Baptist churches operated as a religious tribunal, efforts to use Christianity to control the Gullahs was largely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, Gullahs seemed almost unanimously to prefer religious affiliation through Baptist membership rather than Methodist. Methodist missionaries displayed a more sincere and human interest in the slaves than their sometimes ruthless, Puritan-oriented Baptist masters. "This seems to be a very unpromising portion of our field of labor," wrote one Methodist missionary, "all owing to the prejudices of the negroes." He continued:

> We cannot . . . find fault with the negroes in this portion of our mission field, for preferring another communion to our own; but our voice will ever be lifted against them, for refusing the bread of life, because, forsooth it comes not to them on a silver salver, or from the hands of one who has not "gone down into or come up out of the water."[75]

The cermonious manner in which Baptists initiated converts into church fellowship impressed the Gullahs. Also, despite Calvinist orientation, Baptists were nonheirarchial, worship was less formal, and church structure less legalistic. But, such considerations were not as significant in influencing Gullah acceptance of the Baptist denomination as were other factors. Baptists slaves exercised a religious autonomy the Methodists would not hear of, and this, coupled with the fact that Sea Island slavery was a quasi-absentee type, contributed to the Gullahs' opportunity to control their own religion, to a point. Moreover, in their endeavor to keep blacks under civil control and to keep them on the plantations, slaveholders allowed spiritual permissiveness by legitimizing already existing black societies and leaving them in the hands of black leaders with only minimal white supervision.[76]

The extent to which spiritual autonomy influenced Gullah culture and social organization is most evident in the prominence of black leadership. Baptist planters recommended black watchmen who were supposedly "tried and true," and slaveholders apparently had great confidence in those chosen. Such elders were usually staunch church members, but also influential and respected in the quarters. Methodist missionaries were skep-

4: Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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142
891
301

159
595

Mrs. Mary Pinckney

IT'S TOUGH TO RAISE FIVE CHILDREN—SURE IS

I get married to the church. And I had the reception in Robbie Fields' store. They had wine and piccolo playing, and dancing. I danced once. But I couldn't dance 'cause my dress was too long. Long white dress, white shoes and white veil 'cross my hair. Lot of people came to the church and lot of people at the store. They had as much in the yard as was in the store, couldn't come in. I guess 'round about three hundred head. Big wedding.

159
584

We was young children, growing up together. I met him long time ago, but I didn't realize that was to be my husband today. I remember he was picking the potato on the farm and I had to go work that morning and he

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
Georgia
St. Simon's Island

ZION

533 585 Most Negro weddings, in church or out, are conducted, I am told, without music; but when Ben Davis was married, this song was used with telling effect in the Frederica African Baptist Church. Two ushers walked from the altar with lighted lamps in their hands, and met the bridal party at the door. Two little girls headed the procession and strewed flowers in its path. Ben, with the maid of honor, was followed by the bride on the arm of the best man. To the music of "O Zion—when the bridegroom comes," sung by the guests who filled the church, the participants moved to the altar, where the ushers put down their lamps, and Joe Lowman, the preacher, was waiting for them. When Lowman asked Ben: "Will you take this woman to be your wedded wife?" Ben spoke up "good and strong": "Yes suh!" When the same question was asked of Norah, her answer was very weak. This did not satisfy the parson: "Answer as though you mean it. This ain't for today and tomorrow, this is a lifetime business!" Everybody laughed. Lowman, after the usual procedure, offered a prayer and ended the ceremony by telling Ben to "salute the bride."

533 (461) Besides being used in church and at praise meeting, I find "Zion" was one of the favorite rowing songs of the Butler oarsmen. Tall, lean Liverpool, who looks like an Arab sheik, showed us how he rowed to its rhythm:

533 539 585

Don't you be like the foolish virgin
When the bridegroom come
Don't you be like the foolish virgin
When the bridegroom come.

Chorus: O Zion
(Zion)
O Zion
(Zion)
O Zion
When the bridegroom come.

Have oil in your vessel
When the bridegroom come
Have oil in your vessel
When the bridegroom come.

(repeat chorus)

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
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533 Keep your lamp trimmed and burnin'
539 When the bridegroom come
585 Keep your lamp trimmed and burnin'
When the bridegroom come.

(repeat chorus)

Five were wise an' five were foolish
When the bridegroom come
Five were wise an' five were foolish
When the bridegroom come.

(repeat chorus)

What did the foolish say to the wise
When the bridegroom come
What did the foolish say to the wise
When the bridegroom come.

(repeat chorus)

Lend us some of your oil
When the bridegroom come
Lend us some of your oil
When the bridegroom come.

(repeat chorus)

We will enter into the marriage
When the bridegroom come
We will enter into the marriage
When the bridegroom come.

(repeat chorus)

We will all go out to meet them
When the bridegroom come
We will all go out to meet them
When the bridegroom come.

(repeat chorus)

9: Parrish B-4,5 (ca.1916-1941) 1942
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
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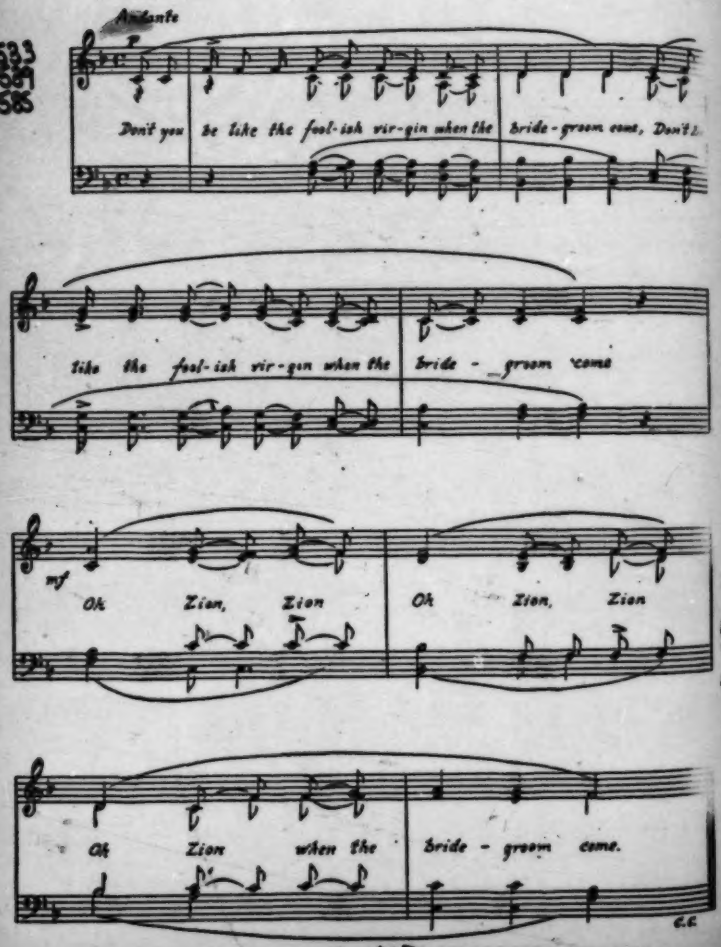
36. ZION

Andante
p
Don't you be like the fool-ish vir-gin when the bride-groom come, Don't
like the fool-ish vir-gin when the bride - groom come
mf
Oh Zion, Zion
Oh Zion, Zion
Oh Zion when the bride - groom come.
C.C.

[p.160]

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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567 men may have, for instance, as many wives as they please, so long as they do not quarrel about such matters."[18] Nevertheless, most planters insisted that their slaves give up their African customs of polygamy and accept the Christian standard of monogamy as the rule of their family life.

567 177 584 St. Helena planters quite generally required their slaves to choose a mate for life, and they attempted to impress the solemnity of the marriage upon the contracting parties by the observance of a ceremony. The engagement of a slave couple was formally recognized on the plantation when the black man asked the master's permission to marry, designating specifically the chosen girl. Many owners encouraged their men to choose from among the girls of their own plantations, but they did not always insist upon it.[19] A man might select his wife from another plantation on the Island, but if he did so he must suffer the inconveniences of not having a woman to look after his clothes, grind his corn into grits, and cook his meals. On the other hand, a wife on a neighboring plantation gave the husband an excuse for leaving his own plantation frequently.

567 585 177 Upon gaining permission to marry, the couple might request that the ceremony be performed at once, whereupon the planter, if without too many religious scruples, might informally "pronounce" them man and wife. The master was more likely to insist, however, upon a marriage by a white preacher or by one of the religious leaders

[18] Hall, *Travels in North America*, II, 216.

[19] Mr. J. Swinton Whaley, of Little Edisto Island, possesses today a bill of sale for a Negro girl his father paid $1,200 for in order that one of his slaves might have the wife he loved.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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from among his own slaves. A wedding was often made the occasion of a general celebration on the plantation. The master gave special provisions, such as beef and rice for making a stew, and molasses for sweetened water to wash it down, and the young ladies made the cake.[20] The mistress and her daughters also influenced the bride to come to the ceremony properly gowned in white with a flowing veil improvised from a discarded window curtain from the master's house. The mistress might provide this extra finery or the bride herself might purchase it with her hoarded savings. If it were the marriage of a house servant, the ceremony might be performed in the kitchen or dining room of the "big house" or in a nearby grove of trees. Marriages of field hands were frequently performed in the open or in the praise house, as the plantation church was called.

After the feasting and the merrymaking were over, the couple went home to the cabin which the master or overseer had set aside for them. But they did not always go home destined to remain faithful to the vows which they had just taken. The looseness of the slave's code of morality was one of the evils most often cited against him.[21] Despite the preachers' instructions upon the nature, sacredness, and perpetuity of marriage many slaves did not hold themselves to such a doctrine. This circumstance is not surprising when one considers the polygamous customs of their African ancestors and the failure of law either to recognize or protect Negro marriages. The issue of an extra-marital relation placed but little additional

[20] Murray, *Letters from the United States*, p. 224.
[21] Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, I, 272, 273.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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567 585 839 567 (144) 567 581 567 581 593 (165)

burden upon the parents, for the master provided for all children alike. A violation of marriage vows was accompanied by no disgrace or punishment other than that inflicted by the master or by the church if the culprit were a member. There seems to have been very little intimacy between the white men and the Negro women on St. Helena Island. The northern missionaries found not more than five or six mulattoes on the whole Island in 1861.

There were forces sufficiently strong to keep many slaves faithful to their marriage vows. Chancellor Harper, of Charleston, called attention in 1854 to the fact that slave marriages were often faithfully adhered to during life.[22] In 1857 a sea-island planter, in recounting the deaths among his people, mentioned with sadness that of "poor old Sandy and his wife Joan." "The latter died apparently of mere debility; and her husband, after watching until her death, went to bed at midnight, complaining merely of a sore throat, and expired the next evening without any one suspecting that he was seriously ill." The planter concluded that the faithful old man had died of "mental depression, operating on a feeble constitution."[23] On Edisto Island there still lives "Old Jeff," born in slavery, who, although as devoted to his wife as Sandy, lived on after her death. Every day he went to her grave to mourn and there he slept at night.[24] After several months his friends became alarmed at his behavior. Upon being questioned he explained that he intended to dig up

[22] "Memoir on Slavery," DeBow, *Industrial Resources of the United States*, II, 219.

[23] Couper-Wylly Papers, James Hamilton Couper to James Couper, April 13, 1857.

11: Johnson H-4,5 (no date) 1930
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the fears of the plantation people, making them "satisfy" with the new order. Miss Towne soon found the women appearing at her back door, shyly offering baskets of eggs in appreciation for the services she had rendered them.

Most of the Negroes Miss Towne thought to be "decidedly unhealthy" with bad teeth and general debility.[43] Their bedding and sleeping apartments were "unsuitable," and they often slept on the floor at night without a change of clothing. They did not take proper care of themselves after exposure to the weather and made little effort to prevent disease. Their medical knowledge was a combination of folk-wisdom, superstition, and facts gleaned from ante-bellum days. They insisted on bathing a patient when the tide was going out so that it might take the fever with it. In 1864 Miss Towne complained, "They keep their rooms so dark I cannot see the patients, and if I order a window opened, I find it nailed up the next time I come. The people are beginning to follow a practice which I dislike. They *will* wash the patients with strong pokeroot, and vinegar and salt."[44]

To the superintendents the family life of the people was one of the most distressing phases of the Negro community. Among the first orders which Pierce issued was one requiring that all marriages among the people be regularly performed by a minister according to law, and he strictly forbade a couple's living together until the ceremony had been pronounced. Charles Ware, assistant superintendent on Coffin's Point plantation, had to deal with several cases arising under this order. In 1862 he wrote to a friend at the North:

[43] *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne*, p. 22. [44] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

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I learned that old Nat's boy, Antony, who wanted to marry Phillis, had given her up and taken Mary Ann, July's daughter, without saying a word to me or any other white man. I called him up to me one afternoon when I was there and told him he must go to church and be married by the minister according to law. He flatly refused, with a good deal of impertinence, using some profane language learned at camp. I thereupon told him he must go home with me, showing him I had a pistol, which I put in my outside pocket. He came along, swearing all the way and muttering his determination not to comply. I gave him lodging in the dark hole under the stairs, with nothing to eat. Next morning old Nat came and expostulated with him, joined by old Ben and Uncle Sam, all of whom pitched into him and told him he was very foolish and ought to be proud of such a chance. He finally gave up and promised to go. So I let him off with an apology. Next Sunday he appeared and was married before a whole church full of people.[48]

But the missionaries found to their sorrow that the Negroes did not always have the proper respect for "a marriage according to law." Limus, a driver, had a wife and grown children on his own plantation and another wife on a plantation nearby. Nevertheless, the missionaries tried to settle such cases with a due regard for the parties concerned and attempted to build up among the people a feeling of family loyalty and pride. They urged the Negroes to buy a table whenever possible and to have regular times for the family meal when all should assemble for the occasion.

Pierce at once opened the two white churches on St. Helena Island which had been closed since "gun shoot." Among the superintendents there were several divinity students and ministers who preached to the Negroes on

[48] *Letters from Port Royal*, p. 95.